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MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

JOHN MORGAN

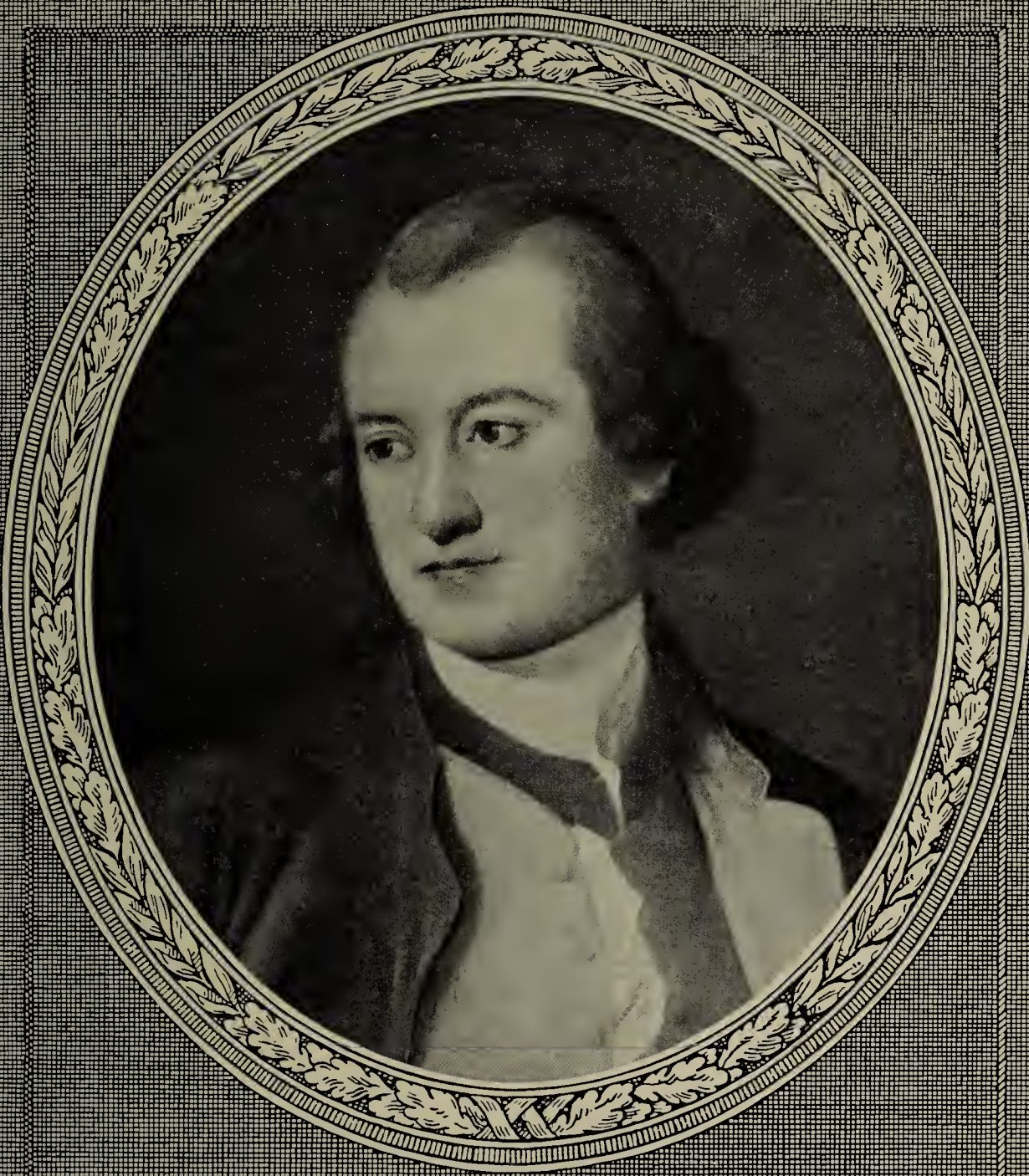
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JOHN MORGAN, who was not a surgeon, was important in the history of American surgery because of his pioneer status as a medical educator and founder of our first medical school and because he was physician in chief and director general of the hospital in the Revolution, a position corresponding to that of the surgeon general of the Army at the present time.

He was born in Philadelphia in 1735, the son of well-to-do parents, Evan and Joanna (Biles) Morgan. He was first sent to school to Rev. Dr. Finley's Nottingham Academy, where he received the classical training for which the place was famous, and then to the College of Philadelphia, where he graduated in the first class to be granted literary honors, that of 1757. During the last years of his college course, he took up the study of medicine under Dr. John Redman. With the medical education derived from this apprenticeship, he became a surgeon, as well as a lieutenant of the line, in the French and Indian War in 1758, being attached to Forbes' expedition against Fort DuQuesne. In 1765 he spoke of having had four years of military experience but it is impossible to see how this could have been so. In 1760 he left the army and sailed to Europe to continue his studies in medicine. In London he worked under William Hunter for a year and then spent two years in Edinburgh, where he was given the M.D. in 1763. From Edinburgh he went to Paris and there spent a winter in the study of anatomy. Thereafter he made the grand tour, calling upon and being warmly received by Morgagni and Voltaire. His journal covering this tour has been published and it reveals the young man taking his sightseeing and art very seriously and systematically. He was made corresponding member of the Academy of Surgery of Paris, a Fellow of the Royal Society, licentiate of the College of Physicians of London, and member of the College of Physicians of Edinburgh. During his residence abroad he planned with William Shippen the founding of a medical school in Philadelphia, and upon his return there in 1765, armed with a strong letter from the proprietor, Thomas Penn, he proposed the establishment of a medical school in connection with the College of Philadelphia (University of Pennsylvania). The idea was approved and he was elected professor of theory and practice of physic, and Shippen was given the professorship of anatomy and surgery. The new school prospered and it has always been one of the leading schools of America.

Before he left England and again in Philadelphia, Morgan wrote that he would attempt the practice of medicine without dispensing his own drugs or practicing surgery, and there is no evidence that he ever did either, except that he attended the wounded on the battle field. He brought from England an apothecary to whom he sent his prescriptions.

* In October, 1775, Dr. Morgan was appointed director general and physician in chief to the hospital, in succession to Dr. Benjamin Church, who had been detected in correspondence with the enemy. Morgan at once repaired to Cambridge, where he assumed the duties which so nearly overwhelmed him for the next fifteen months. Morgan had trouble with Dr. Stringer, director of the Hospital of the Northern Department, with Dr. Shippen, director of the Hospital of the Flying Camp in New Jersey, and with the regimental surgeons and officers, who felt that he was negligent of their needs and opposed to their interests. Congress also, influenced by complaints, showed itself hostile to him and eventually, in January, 1777, it dismissed him and Dr. Stringer without trial, and a few months later it promoted Dr. Shippen to the position of director general. Dr. Morgan at once began to beseech Congress for vindication. This Congress granted in June, 1779, in a resolution which declared that he "did conduct himself ably and faithfully in the discharge of his office," but it did not reappoint him to the office. Meanwhile Morgan was joined by Benjamin Rush, James Tilton, and perhaps others, in making charges against Shippen. Shippen was brought to trial in 1780 and was honorably acquitted. Morgan's accusations against him were doubtless motivated in part by chagrin, while the writings of Rush and Tilton show them both to have been men of acrid humor and hearty dislikes. Such was the disorganization, poverty, lack of transportation, low state of discipline in the Army, such the jealousy between colonies and communities, such the lack of preparation for war and the ignorance and indiscipline of the people, such the meddlesomeness of Congress and its neglect of the Army, that it may be that nobody could have been more successful as director general of the hospital in 1776-7 than was Morgan. As a matter of fact, Washington's success with the Army of that time was little better. Nevertheless, Morgan's "Vindication of his Public Character," written by himself and published in Boston in 1777, does permit the inference that, despite the evils with which he had to bear or to contend, he might have accomplished more except for drawbacks due to his own personality. These faults were apparently two: first, an inability to delegate work, which was not wholly compensated for by the hardest of work on his own part, and second, a mistaken or too modest conception of his duties as director general. The individual regiments at first brought their own medical men, and Washington found the need at Cambridge to be for a general hospital service. Congress legislated for that, but not, as Morgan viewed the matter, for any regimental service; whereas the regiments and apparently the States, and possibly



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Congress itself, expected him to make provision for all medical necessities. Had Morgan boldly taken this same view and regarded himself as the one responsible for all medical service, he might have had greater support from the regimental officers, line as well as medical, and so had greater success. As it was, he regarded himself as having to do only with "The Hospital" and not with the regiments; he was unable to furnish these with necessary supplies; the regimental surgeons thought him negligent of, and opposed to, their needs and they worked against him. From their enmity arose a large part of his troubles.

Another large part came from the promotions of Stringer and Shippen, due partly to politics, possibly in part to the machinations of the two, but possibly also in part to Morgan's too great concentration on the work in his immediate vicinity, with consequent inability to look after the service of distant forces in any effective manner.

As a young man, Morgan was admired and copied, he had his place among the intellectual elite of the city, he was sufficiently untrammelled by custom to be able to avoid surgery and the dispensing of drugs, things which all other American physicians did. He could even indulge in the then foppish peculiarity of carrying a silk umbrella.

After his military service he wrote nothing except his "Vindication" and he largely retired from the public gaze, although continuing to practice and to teach. He died at Philadelphia on October 15, 1789.

He was a learned man, a delightful personality, possibly an excellent administrator, certainly a hard worker, but his army service came at a time when success in it was all but impossible, when Washington himself was meeting with every kind of defeat and discouragement. But he is one of the great figures in American medical education. His published writings are: (1) *De Puopiesi, sive Tentamen Medicum Inaugurale de Puris Confectione*. Edinburgh, 1763. 55 pp. (2) *Discourse upon the Institution of Medical Schools in America*. Philadelphia, 1765. 91 pp. 12 mo. (3) *A Recommendation of Inoculation, according to Baron Dimsdale's method*. Boston, 1776. 18 pp. (4) *A Vindication of his Public Character in the Station of Director-General of the Military Hospitals, and Physician in Chief to the American Army, Anno 1776*. Boston, 1777. 158 pp. (5) *The Journal of Dr. John Morgan*. Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1907. 259 pp.

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